

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

Harry Wetherill's Trip to the Moon in Search of Anita, the Girl Who Mysteriously Disappeared Seventy-five Years Ago

HARRY WETHERILL, a boy who won the friendship of a lot of gnomes, learned from them the secret of the moonstone's power to move with wonderful speed from place to place. He was testing this power when the big stone on which he was riding took him into a wonderful garden. Here Mr. Densmore, the owner of the place, told Harry about the mysterious disappearance of his daughter, seventy-five years ago. She was playing with a moonstone at the time, and this gave Harry an idea that a wizard might have spoken the magic words which started the stone and that it had taken her straight to the moon. He promised the father to search for his child.

That seemed to satisfy Mr. Densmore, and he declared that all he possessed would be Harry's if he found Anita in the moon, where Harry supposed her to be, or anywhere else, and she were returned to her parent.

So Harry said good-bye, and then, pronouncing the magic word, "Umpah," the moonstone shot upward so rapidly that in a moment it had vanished from the view of the anxious old man. Harry had started for the moon.

Now, had he been more familiar with astronomy and physics, perhaps, he would never have started at all, or at least not without careful preparations, for it is well known to us philosophers that there is no atmosphere outside of a few miles about this earth of ours, and therefore none on the moon, so that one who goes on such a journey by anything like an ordinary conveyance, such as an airship, for instance, would have to take a supply of air along, as well as food and water, but Harry never even thought of this.

He went away as unprepared as he would have been when going to school, so that Mr. Densmore, on reflecting upon the matter, soon concluded that he would never return, but would be overcome and expire for lack of air, and the moonstone would go on and on, carrying a dead boy, until it came smack up against the moon and smashed to bits.

But nothing like this happened, because the stone flew so fast that it drew along with it enough atmosphere for a dozen people, and its speed was so incredibly great that it reached the moon in less than an hour; therefore the boy needed neither food nor water on the journey.

Fast as the moonstone flew, however, Harry was able to see distinctly, and he watched the earth recede with feelings of awe. At first there lay beneath a vast expanse of brown and green, spread out like a great colored map of his own land; then the view broadened and two oceans came into sight at either side, shining in the sunlight like great ponds, for already he was so distant that the great waves were invisible, and the seas seemed as glass mirrors.

Then very soon he saw the whole world, an immense globe, flattened at the poles, as the geography said it was, and all the continents on the side toward him were plain to view. Great mountains seemed but as small hills on this globe, or like the little irregularities on the skin of an orange, and he could see the world turning on its axis, also.

This was so extremely interesting that he forgot all about the object of his journey as he gazed down at everything, and if he had not suddenly recollected himself he would probably have collided with the moon before he was aware of its presence, but, looking over his shoulder and seeing it still far away, he began to be careful.

Now his attention was turned entirely to the lunar orb. It gleamed pale and white in the sunshine, and as soon as he began to look at it it seemed, as he approached, to be under him, instead of above, and he coming down upon it, while the distant earth was in the heaven above him and as small as the moon usually seems to be to us.

Great peaks with black craters showed all over its whitened surface, but he saw no seas nor green trees. It seemed torn, cracked and ragged all over, dark fissures and purple crevices being the most striking features on the landscape, while the absence of clouds showed that there was no moisture anywhere. As he flew nearer he could detect no signs of animal life, but he soon saw that there were peculiar pale blue plants, that looked like corals and sponges or queer seaweeds, growing everywhere, and immense mushrooms, as tall as houses, loomed up in all directions like enormous umbrellas or collar buttons. He stopped the moonstone by saying "Bazipp" and looked about him, when he was perhaps five hundred feet from the surface.

Looking at his watch he found that it had taken him exactly fifty-four minutes to arrive at the moon's surface and he merely glanced around him twice before coming to the conclusion, to return to earth and get his camera, for he felt that nothing but photographs of the wonders about him would convince people that he had ever visited the moon. So in another minute he was flying back earthward as swiftly as he had left it. He did not look back, or he would have seen, rushing out from the ebony gloom of the craters, many strange shapes that brandished after him long, waving arms or tentacles, as if in rage and disappointment; the forms which he had dimly seen lurking in the deep shadows far away where the sunlight lost itself.

These were the moon men who had hoped to capture the intruder upon their solitudes, but Harry evaded them unconsciously, for they had hidden in the craters at his approach in order to spring out upon him when he alighted. They glared after him with their great moonlike eyes until he vanished, and then moved away into their hiding places below the moon's surface.

Harry reached home in twenty-nine minutes, for the moonstone moved much faster earthward, of course, as the law of gravitation worked so much stronger. He alighted in the yard, and there he saw his gnome friend, who inquired eagerly into his actions and was immensely interested when he heard what had been accomplished, but Harry had no time for long descriptions, for he wanted to return at once.

"There are things on the moon; look out for them!" said the gnome. "We have a notion that



THE DEATH OF THE GREAT "SPRING-WORM"

they are some sort of relations of our own, but I do not believe that. However, we know from ancient tradition that they are terribly cruel, treacherous and sly, so beware of having anything to do with them, or else all will fail, and you'll lose our splendid moonstone!"

Harry promised to be cautious, and then hurried in after his camera and a bit of lunch. These were soon secured, and then the gnome watched him as Mr. Densmore had until he vanished in the blue dome above, seemingly shooting right up toward the sun, for the moon was, of course, invisible at that time of day.

The moonstone was soon hovering over the moon's surface again, and Harry somewhat anxiously peered down into all the crannies for a sight of the dangerous moon creatures against whom he had been warned, but he saw nothing in the shape of gnomes or men. Instead, he perceived many other curious objects, which led him to approach close to the ground and study them.

Flowers grew there with heads like cats, and these bent down and caught the ball-shaped things frequently in their jaws and swallowed them at once with every sign of enjoyment. Among the leaves of these plants crawled caterpillars of gold and rose, flashing like gems and chirping like crickets! Feathered toads hopped about in the shade of the silvery rocks, and barked like little puppies at Harry's legs hanging down over the edge of the moonstone, while blue spiders, with yellow spots, sat in their webs and clawed out at him as he swept slowly past—spiders as big as dinner plates, and with eyes like diamonds.

As Harry took in all these wonders and at the same time kept a sharp lookout for other dangers, his eye fell on an object lying beneath a great crimson toadstool, and he started in surprise. It was a small red slipper! There it lay as if dropped yesterday, and instantly he was certain that Anita had been carried to the moon, although he had been well convinced before.

He dropped to the ground and seized the slipper eagerly, but of course there was nothing about it that could furnish him with any definite information, but as slippers were not made on the moon somebody must have brought it there, and who could it have been but the little girl who possessed a moonstone? He was sure that he would soon come upon other traces of her, and he softly uttered the word "Gish" that moved the moonstone aside, and it proceeded to glide along the moon's surface, dodging the giant tree trunks like a living being, as if seeking for itself the lost maiden's retreat. Suddenly it stopped with no word from Harry, and looking ahead he saw a herd of strange, cow-like creatures, with legs twice as long as their bodies, all of them frisking clumsily about among the plants on the mountainside.

"Gee!" cried Harry, after looking carefully at them. "If these are not moon-calves, I lose my guess!"

The animals, hearing a voice, something hitherto unknown to them, all stopped and stood staring at him in a stupid manner as if stricken with wonder. They were certainly moon-calves, and Harry instantly took a picture of them. The slight click made by the camera startled the herd and they galloped up the mountainside and vanished in a dark crevice. They uttered no sounds, fleeing as silently as deer.

But another creature, attracted by the strange phenomenon of a voice in that silent land, came creeping out of the curious shrubbery toward the boy. This was a giant thing formed like a jelly-fish, a tremendous umbrella-shape, flattened down close to the ground, so that its short, caterpillar-like legs did not show at all. Colorless, pale, slimy, with great dull eyes that yet glared hideously, its pulpy and jelly-like form shaking and undulating as it moved toward him. Then stopping within twenty feet, it gathered itself up into a ball-shape, and Harry saw that it was about to spring upon him! He said "Bazipp" quicker than ever before and the moonstone shot upward. The creature leaped, but fell short, turned a somersault and fell upon its back.

On he went over great hills of pure white stone,

over green rocks like emerald, sapphire boulders, vermilion forests of gnarled tangles, across flat plains of silvery stuff, but never saw water nor any green living vegetation such as we have on the earth. The great craters of long-extinct volcanoes yawned beneath him, and he could see far down into their depths; some of them were fifty miles across the mouth, and he sailed over gaping cracks in the moon that were twenty miles wide and nobody knows how deep, but he felt no temptation to descend into their gloomy depths.

All the time he was watching for signs of Anita, hoping to come upon some sort of habitation at any moment, and really going too swiftly to properly examine the wonders he met with.

Twice he shot clear around into the dark of the moon, but of course it was as black there as in a cellar at midnight, and he realized that it was quite useless to waste time there, so back he went into the shining daylight.

Now he went slowly, peering into every cranny, but remaining far from the surface, for this time he saw something that filled him with fear. Just as he came into full light something sprang upward, a long, elastic, snakey thing, shooting up like a jack-in-the-box at him, and really coming so near to getting him that Harry's heart almost stopped beating for an instant. The thing drew back as suddenly as it had shot upward, gathered itself in a sort of lumpy form, and then again launched its whole length skyward.

One end remained attached to the ground and it stretched upward for a mile! Its mouth, as he now saw, was almost as large as the worklike body and had row after row of snake's teeth adorning its inside. This great mouth closed like a bag, all sides at once, and came together with a snap just as a steel trap does, but again it fell short of its prey, for the moonstone rose as swift as thought and avoided its attack.

But the last effort seemed to have hurt the thing, for it fell on the ground, writhing and twisting as if in agony, and while it tossed and squirmed there sprang upon its prostrate form an animal about as large as a hippopotamus, but shaped somewhat like a weasel, only tailless and without hair, for absolutely nothing grows hair on the moon, and this animal tore the wormy thing into rags, shreds and tatters in a jiffy, much to Harry's delight, but it did not eat it.

In fact, upon descending and examining the thing after the weasel creature had leaped away as swiftly as it had come, Harry saw that the worm was literally a hollow skin, with a long spiral bone like a spring that ran from its head to its tail and furnished the power whereby it launched itself upward like a skyrocket, and that the tail end of this spring-bone was bored into the ground, for twenty feet, holding it there steadily and firmly. Its awful head Harry fastened to the moonstone with a piece of stout twine, for he was resolved to take it home to show to Professor Rankin, and then he sought for the animal which had destroyed it, and, finding him in a clump of trees, he took a photograph of him before passing onward.

He had not proceeded many miles before he saw in front a large opening in the side of a mountain of greenish rock, which did not seem very large at first, but when he neared it showed as an enormous cavern running far back into the mountain and which was nearly a mile wide, a cave so wonderfully large that he stared in astonishment as he approached it. When he came to its entrance he soon saw that the rock was as transparent as glass, and the sunlight penetrating it lighted up the whole cavern with a pale green illumination that was wonderfully pleasing.

He sailed in and found the interior as mysterious as anything else in the moon. Great masses of emerald-hued rock, were apparently carved into all sorts of marvelous forms, here were fountains, pits set up against the carved walls; there were statues in all sorts of attitudes, animals, figures, flowers, ships, towers, minarets, domes, while from the roof hung spirals, lanterns, fruits, birds, every manner of pendant shapes, and all through the cavern columns, carved, fluted, round, square, spiral and fretted, held up the rock above and were ranged in rows as far as the eye could reach.

Everywhere were alcoves wherein were cunningly carved couches and chairs like thrones, and niches with statues so life-like that they seemed to be about to step down to greet the stranger, and tables with every sort of dish upon them, all of green stone, yet marvelously perfect. Harry took picture after picture here as he headed his way through the forest of columns farther and farther into the cavern, but suddenly he realized that perhaps he had better spare a few plates for the future.

While he was counting them to see how many he had he heard a strange fluttering noise, and saw coming toward him a mass of bats flying along the roof of the cavern. There were millions of them and they were all of the most brilliant fiery red, but that was not the strangest thing about them, for their eyes resembled lobster's eyes, standing out on stems six or eight inches from their heads, and they were all hairless. Bald-headed bats were new to Harry, especially bats with lobster's eyes, and he gazed at them in wonder until he saw what was driving them forth, when his wonder changed to alarm.

Behind them came things the like of which even in his dreams he had never conceived. These were more like cuttlefish walking on their tentacles or eels than anything else, yet there was something so man-like about them that he shuddered.

They were ten or fifteen feet high when they stood erect, with round, pulpy bodies to which were attached twenty long feelers that were boneless and as pliable as whips, but upon which they seemed to have little difficulty in walking or standing. On top of this body, that seemed transparent or nearly so, was placed a head, but without a neck, and this head was skinless, as bare of cuticle as a skull, and its great eyes were placed in deep-sunken sockets, red, glowing eyes like those of wolves, that glared upward as they followed the flight of the red bats like so many glowing coals.

Right in the centre of each stomach was a wide-grinning mouth, out of which hung a carmine tongue, but he could see no teeth in any of these hideous mouths and all was silent as the grave.

There were perhaps four hundred of these creatures following the bats, and waving aloft stems of some moon-born plant having spikes on its leaves, which seemed to terrify the flying vermin above them and caused them to flutter wildly whenever one of the moon men approached.

Harry had scarcely seen the moon men when they became aware of his presence in the cavern, and they seemed to be thrown into wild excitement, instantly brandishing their plant stems furiously at him and apparently exchanging signals or otherwise communicating the news to one another, although they were dumb and voiceless as clams.

They rushed wildly to and fro beneath him, glaring up like demons, but as the cavern was a mile from floor to roof he felt little fear of them and soared above them calmly and unconcerned. Still, so horrible were their glances, that at times he shivered to think what might happen if he fell into their clutches, and also when he reflected that long ago the girl Anita must have been captured by these very creatures that acted like crazy spiders and looked something like men.

In a few moments his unconcern vanished, for now the moon men began to swarm up the columns that filled the cavern, and so many were the fantastic projections from the walls, and even from the roof itself, they soon were clinging by their tentacles from every possible point, sliding down the green stalactites and columns and swarming up again silently, swiftly and determinedly, so that presently the cavern seemed alive with squirming creatures.

The moonstone seemed to act as if alive and moved carefully, avoiding the out-reaching feelers cleverly and carrying Harry now high in air, now just clear of those moon men on the floor. The moon men opened their gaping mouths as if shouting, but nothing issued from the red openings, and this made it all seem more frightful and like some horrid dream from which he would awake and shudder with relief.

As the moonstone passed swiftly along, the excitement of the creatures seemed to increase and become a wild madness, for they leaped and grimed and shook their arms in a desperate frenzy,

The Many Wonderful Things He Saw There and the Adventures He Had Before He Returned With the Lost Maiden

as if growing insane at the failure of their efforts to capture the boy.

The cavern roof became loftier and the columns fewer, and then a great, green dome, like an emerald sky, rose over Harry, a smooth, shining vault, upon the surface of which no climbing, crawling being could gain a foothold, and the moon men gathered below him and fairly sprawled in an agony of rage upon the smooth floor.

He passed twice around this great vault, but seeing another wide passage beyond with no columns or other obstructions, he thought to emerge from the cavern by that outlet, although somewhat fearful of being entrapped in some place without an exit.

As he moved into this hall, which was square-cut and plain, the moon men rushed in after him in such numbers that he could not see the floor, and they seemed to be even more anxious to stop him; but he swept on and on, arriving soon at the end of the passage where it turned sharply, and, after a few hundred feet, opened into a hall of such splendor and beauty that Harry was amazed and entranced.

But all the glory of it faded away instantly when his eyes fell on a little girl in a red dress who was seated on a sort of pyramid in the centre of the space; a little girl who beckoned him to her with her eyes shining with joy.

He knew somehow that this must be Anita, although he well knew that seventy-five years had passed since she had been taken from her father, yet all these years had never touched her with their marks; she was a child of ten still, but the wisdom in her eyes and the gravity of her smile showed that she knew much more than a little girl knows.

Surrounding her in a circle sat fifty squat forms like great toads; legless moon men, guarding her even from the other moon men; and each spat out poison about him, so that no moon man dare approach the foot of the pyramid upon which the child sat on a great crystal chair. The toad-like creatures gazed up stolidly and then spat their poison upward, but as spitters they were not very superior, and the venom fell far short of its object. As Anita was beckoning him on, Harry felt that there was little danger, else she would have warned him, and when the moonstone came close she called out:

"Approach, dear boy. I feel that I know you, for I saw you talking to papa in our garden at home."

"Can you see that far from here?" cried Harry, as he sailed close to her and touched her to assure himself that he was not dreaming it all.

She pointed upward, and following her finger he saw that the dome was open above, and light there the earth seemed to be hanging. He could see plainly all that was happening there, and the sight was so inspiring that he seized Anita around the waist and said, "BAZIPP!"

Up rose the moonstone, and, as if even the toad-like guards could not restrain the moon men, they poured up the sides after it, but it shot out of the opening like a rocket and then soared away down the sides of that vast green mountain like a thistle-down, every moon man in pursuit. The sloping mountainside was covered with tiny fragments of debris, probably the chips from the mystic carvings within, done by gnomish ancestors ages since.

As the moon men hurried down they caused these chips to loosen, and pretty soon a perfect avalanche of fragments was started, which, growing greater and greater, soon swept the moon men onward, and at the foot of the mountain it fell upon them and buried them many feet deep, crushing them into jelly and wiping out the whole tribe at once.

Meanwhile, with Anita beside him, his camera at his back and the head of the worklike thing swinging by the string beneath him, Harry shot back to earth, while Anita in vast delight told him her story.

As he had supposed, she had been taken by her moonstone, which she still had concealed in her dress, up to the moon because the wizard had uttered the mystic word, "Umpah," over it, and there the moon men had confined her upon the guarded throne by order of the wizard himself, who had died not long after, thus keeping her a prisoner hopeless and forlorn for seventy-five years.

All this time she had watched her distracted father as he sought for her all over the world, in the most isolated places as well as where men gathered together for good deeds or bad. She had never grown older, while she saw him bent at last under the weight of years and sorrow, although he never gave up hope.

"Oh, what will he say," she cried, "when he sees me and finds me just the same little girl? I am afraid he will not like it."

"He never has thought of you as anything else," replied Harry. "He told me so himself, and I am sure that is the truth."

"I am glad of that," she added, "for, after all, if I had grown so very, very old, you wouldn't, perhaps, have bothered about taking me away from the moon men, and I might have remained there forever. Now I suppose that I will grow up just like other children."

"No doubt; and when you are old enough you are to marry me, for that's what your father said, also; that is, he said I could have all his hands and you also, but I think I'll be satisfied just to have you," said Harry, as he held her closer, although there was not the slightest danger of her falling off.

And all this came out as Harry had said, for when they arrived at the garden Anita's father recognized her and cried: "My child! My Anita!" and utterly forgot how many weary years had passed since he last saw her. He held her close and then said:

"Now I can die in peace!"

But he lived for a long time after that; long enough to see her grow up and marry Harry, and see all the gnomes at the first human wedding they had ever attended, as well as to hold on his knee another little Anita just like her mother. She plays in the beautiful garden with the same moonstone, but as there are no longer any wizards, I suppose that she is perfectly safe; still, if she were my little girl, I think I would give the moonstone away to a jeweler to put in his window. WALT McDUGALL.